



NEWS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TEENS CALLED ON TO CREATE TV COMMERCIALS TO DISCOURAGE TEXTING AND DRIVING

Contest Rules and Entry Forms on www.RockTheBelt.org

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) and AAA Minnesota/Iowa is calling on Minnesota’s teenagers to do “thumbthing” about the dangers of texting and driving by participating in the *Don’t Text and Drive, Teens! TV Commercial Challenge*.

Minnesota teens in grades 9–12 are eligible to create and produce a 30-second TV spot to communicate the dangers associated with driving while texting and the solutions to avoid the dangerous and illegal behavior. Since August 2008, texting, emailing, composing messages and web browsing has been illegal for drivers of all ages with violations costing up to \$300.

The top spots will be selected by DPS, AAA Minnesota/Iowa and a teen panel for public online voting in May. AAA Minnesota/Iowa will award first-, second- and third-place finishers with \$1,000, \$600 and \$400, respectively. The winning spot will make its television broadcast premiere in spring 2010. Rules and entry forms are online at www.rockthebelt.org. Spots are due to DPS by April 19, 2010. Teens are also encouraged to post their spots on the DPS Office of Traffic Safety Facebook page (“MnDPS_OTSTraffic Safety”).

“Teens have the opportunity to deliver a positive, life-saving message so their friends get their thumbs off the phone and back on the wheel,” says Gordy Pehrson, youth traffic safety coordinator of DPS Office of Traffic Safety.

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for teens — a group overrepresented each year due to driver inexperience, risk-taking behavior, distractions, nighttime driving, speeding and seat belt non-use. During 2006–2008, 118 teens (ages 16–19), were killed and another 577 were seriously injured in crashes.

DPS reports that distraction or inattention factors in at least 25 percent of all crashes annually, resulting in at least 70 deaths and 9,000 serious injuries.

Pehrson recommends teens put their cell phone out of reach when behind the wheel and encourages passengers to handle calls and texts for drivers to reduce distraction. He also reminds teens and their parents that cell phone use for drivers with a provisional license is prohibited by law.

View finalists and the winning spot from the 2009 *Buckle Up, Teens! TV Commercial Contest* at www.rockthebelt.org.

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